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**March 29, 2006**

**Rules Committee Original Jurisdiction Hearing on H.R. 4975, the "Lobbying  
Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006"**  
**Testimony of Rep. Earl Blumenauer**

Like all of my colleagues, I am greatly concerned with the recent revelations of wrongdoings by both Members of Congress and the lobbyists with whom they work. It has been made abundantly clear that it is past time to address the laws and rules governing the ethical behavior of both members and lobbyists.

There are currently many proposals addressing ethics reform in Congress, one of them being the bill being considered by this Committee today. While I appreciate the intent of the legislation, I fear that it does not go far enough in terms of reporting requirements and it fails to address the key tool that will enable our process to work in a truly fair and transparent manner – oversight. The gift and travel rules should be reformed, but the problem is much bigger than this. The current issues we face with lobbying accountability will not be solved by preventing a Member of Congress from receiving a free t-shirt or by preventing him from traveling on official business. These changes will not carry any water unless we have a way of effectively policing lobbyist action.

Currently, lobbyists are required to file reports of their expenditures with the Clerk of the House. The Clerk does not have the capacity nor the ability to properly monitor these documents. Members of Congress currently make disclosures to the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, a group of current Members of Congress who lack the proper amount of time to do the job, the ability to maintain impartiality, and the desire to perform these important functions. No matter how strong the reforms are in the areas of travel, gifts, and reporting requirements, they are only as effective as our means of oversight and enforcement.

We need an independent panel that can make independent decisions without worry about the affect those decisions will have on their political future. We need an independent panel whose members understand the reality of public service and the need to ensure integrity of that service through adherence to the rules. We need an independent panel that can meet the test of public scrutiny and restore trust that today is missing.

To this end, I recently introduced along with my colleague and fellow Oregonian, Greg Walden, H.R. 4948, the "Ethics Reform Act of 2006." This bill establishes an independent ethics review process, similar to that found in many states.

H.R. 4948 creates an 11-member outside Ethics Commission with a full-time professional staff to provide oversight, investigations and recommendations for ethical enforcement. Ten of the members would be former House members-five from each party-who had been out of office at least two years. These panel members would bring the experience of public service and the understanding of the complexity of our duties. These ten members would select an 11<sup>th</sup> member.

Professional staff, headed by an executive director, would serve this independent body. The Speaker of the House and the Minority Leader of the House would choose the executive director in a manner similar to the appointment of the director of the Congressional Budget Office. The Ethics Commission would manage all of the duties currently performed by the Office of Standards of Official Conduct. They would be responsible for monitoring filing of Members, performing investigation of Member conduct, and advising offices on the ethical rules and laws governing the House of Representatives.

Any recommendations of the Independent Ethics Commission beyond advisory opinions, letters of reprove and admonishment would go to the full House. Actions that fall short of official discipline would not require action of the House.

In addition to performing and strengthening the general duties currently performed by the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, the Commission's duties would be extended to overseeing the actions of lobbyists; the Lobbying Disclosure Act would be brought under the jurisdiction of the Independent Ethics Commission.

The Commission would review the filings of lobbyists and post lobbyist fillings online quarterly for public viewing at no charge. The Commission would review all reports filed by Members, officers, and employees of the House of Representatives and lobbyists for inconsistencies or mutual interests and expenditures between any of them and lobbyists.

The time when Members of Congress could effectively govern themselves has long since passed. In reforming the rules of ethical conduct, we must make sure the process moves efficiently and transparently in a manner that will restore the public's trust in Congressional action. The Ethics Reform Act of 2006 has the power to do so. I encourage the Committee to give careful consideration to this bill as it develops comprehensive ethics reforms.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Earl Blumenauer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending from the end.